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Chairman: Mr. Mohamad ..... (Sudan)

Contents

Agenda item 35: Questions relating to information

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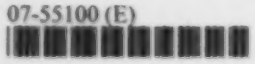

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 35: Questions relating to information (A/62/21 and A/62/205)

1. **Mr. Maleki** (Islamic Republic of Iran), speaking in his capacity as Rapporteur of the Committee on Information, introduced the report of that Committee (A/62/21), which provided information on the Committee's activities and recommendations in the form of draft resolutions. With the appointment of Thailand and the Dominican Republic, the Committee on Information had a total of 110 members. Zambia's request for full membership of the Committee would be considered at its next session.

2. During the general debate at the 2007 session, members had emphasized the central role of the Department of Public Information (DPI) in disseminating information on the Organization's goals and had acknowledged the vital role of the Committee on Information and its cooperation with DPI. The international community had been called upon to step up its efforts to close the growing digital divide between the developed and developing countries. Speakers had noted that the presence of United Nations information centres in the developing countries, particularly the least developed countries, enhanced the flow of information in those countries and assisted them in addressing disparities. They had requested the Department to ensure parity among the official languages. With regard to cooperation between DPI and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department had been encouraged to devise and implement a comprehensive communications strategy that highlighted success stories of peacekeeping and the role of peacekeepers. Although the Department had been praised for its development of the United Nations website, the importance of traditional means of communications, especially radio, had been emphasized.

3. In a statement made before the conclusion of the session, the Group of 77 and China had noted that the Group had agreed to a proposal by the European Union to streamline the resolution of the Committee on Information. In 2008, the Group would circulate a draft resolution that reflected that desire. The Group had also stated that discussions on the name of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library would be deferred until the next session. The Group, the European Union and other members had agreed to set up an ad hoc committee to review those issues.

4. **Mr. Akasaka** (Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information), introducing the report of the Secretary-General (A/62/205), said that, following consultations with Member States during his first six months as Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, he had implemented a number of new initiatives. In line with the Secretary-General's vision that the Department should communicate the Organization's work to the global public based on positive results, DPI had developed a strategic approach that included six components: integrated use of traditional means of communications and new information and communications technologies (ICTs); targeted delivery of public information products; greater integration of the information centres in the implementation of communications strategies; greater partnership with civil society; system-wide coordination; and internal evaluation of major activities. Two events that had highlighted that approach in 2007 had been the Secretary-General's High-Level Event on Climate Change and the Stand Up and Speak Out against Poverty and for the Millennium Development Goals event in October 2007. The integrated approach had benefited work in priority areas such as peace and security, human rights and the Department's annual international media seminar on peace in the Middle East.

5. The information centres were essential to the Department's work, serving as a bridge between global audiences and partners in the field. More opportunities had been created to bring the centres' staff together at regional levels, and communications between the field and Headquarters had been improved. In order to improve productivity, increase global outreach and respond to the demand for information, the Department had made full use of ICTs. It had provided webcasts of meetings, posted photos and videos on the Internet and had used videoconferences to link partners worldwide. The Department had also taken steps to use new technology to reach audiences in other ways. The News Centre on the United Nations home page had been reconfigured to make it a multimedia news portal for news products and the press releases page had been rebuilt to make it more user-friendly. All United Nations texts, video and audio-based news would be made available on mobile devices.

6. The Department's audio library would be placed online, allowing broadcasters to access audio of all major intergovernmental meetings, speeches and press conferences. In order to save valuable resources, media accreditation was processed electronically. The proposal to change the name of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library to the "Dag Hammarskjöld Library and Knowledge Centre" or "DHLink" reflected the increasing emphasis on the use of ICTs in the library services.

7. In addition to the emphasis on new ICTs, traditional means of communications remained vital. Working closely with partners, United Nations Radio was extending its once-a-day news programme to continuous feeds throughout the day. Those feeds were available in Arabic, English and Spanish, and other languages would follow. Without putting a strain on departmental resources, several important partnerships had been established to enhance sensitization programmes. The Annual DPI/NGO Conference offered the opportunity to establish partnerships with new non-governmental organizations. The United Nations Orchestra had been set up to promote the Organization's goals and the Yearbook had been placed online. Several United States organizations had requested the presence of United Nations speakers at events commemorating United Nations Day.

8. It was important to promote those kinds of initiatives, given that the Secretariat Building would be closed for renovations under the Capital Master Plan. The Department had also worked with universities and schools to promote the Organization's work. The "Holocaust and the United Nations" outreach programme, which had been entirely funded by partners, was a good example of an effective partnership aimed at disseminating the General Assembly's message. The most important resource available to DPI was its staff and efforts were being made to make effective use of human resources in order to achieve the Secretary-General's vision of "a stronger United Nations for a better world".

9. **The Chairman** said that millions of individuals had benefited from the Department's work. The Department had successfully transmitted the Organization's messages and objectives. It was especially important for the Department to disseminate information on the Millennium Development Goals and the dialogue among civilizations, which were of vital importance to the consolidation of global peace and security.

10. *A video on the work of the Department was shown.*

11. **The Chairman** said that the Committee would hold an interactive dialogue on the item, and invited members to put questions to the Under-Secretary-General.

12. **Mr. Maleki** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that it would be interesting to learn more about the Department's work during the reporting period in promoting the dialogue among civilizations and in modernizing its information centres in the developing countries.

13. **Ms. Abdelhady-Nasser** (Observer for Palestine) expressed appreciation for the efforts of the Department's Palestine, Decolonization and Human Rights Section to increase awareness of the situation in Palestine in all its facets and for its training programme for Palestinian journalists. The annual international media seminar organized by the Department, which gathered together media and civil-society representatives, both Palestinian and Israeli, likewise played an important role in promoting dialogue on the situation in Palestine.

14. **Ms. Yan** Jiarong (China) noted that in a relatively short period of time the issue of climate change had become a priority for the international community. She requested more information on any particularly successful strategies the Department had used to increase awareness of that issue and asked whether they could also be applied in other areas. She also requested more information on the Department's efforts to provide training to journalists and the media in the developing countries and on the television magazine "21st Century" mentioned in the video, including which countries were broadcasting it, and in particular whether it was broadcast in China.

15. **Mr. Akasaka** (Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information), in response to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, said that his Department had numerous activities aimed at promoting dialogue among civilizations, including seminars on such topics as the Holocaust, averting genocide, and combating hatred, as well as art exhibits and cultural programmes and articles in the *UN Chronicle*. The Department was also available to help

organize and coordinate events aimed at promoting dialogue among civilizations. With regard to the modernization of resources in the United Nations information centres, he said that he had instructed the Department to undertake a survey of their needs. In addition to upgrading material resources, it was equally important to increase training opportunities. For example, a week-long library workshop had been held in Bangkok for reference assistants from information centres in Asia and the Pacific, including Iran.

16. With regard to the statement by the Observer for Palestine, he said that the Department was currently working on preparations for the 2008 annual international media seminar for Palestine. He hoped those seminars and the Department's other efforts would contribute to dialogue between the Palestinian and Israeli participants.

17. Turning to the questions posed by the representative of China, he said that the Department's efforts in the area of climate change provided an example of optimal use of the Organization's resources. An important step in coordinating the efforts of the Organization was the web portal on climate change, which provided an overview of the efforts of 15 agencies. It was also important to have a communications strategy aimed at transmitting clear messages about what was expected of the Organization as well as of Member States with regard to both actions and policy development. The Department tried to highlight the need to adapt to climate change and to present concrete information on the consequences of climate change based on the findings and projections of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in order to help people understand the issue. In that context, he noted that the IPPC web page, unlike the United Nations portal, was confusing and it was difficult to identify the major messages that needed to be communicated.

18. He underscored the importance of television and webcasts and said that he intended to increase the use of those tools. The Department also had an annual fellowship programme to provide training to media professionals from the developing countries and the countries in transition. As for the programme "21st Century," he said that it was available in China and would also be available on BBC World starting in January 2008. The programme was a monthly 30-minute documentary-style broadcast on human-interest stories.

19. **Ms. Williams** (Jamaica) welcomed the exhibition organized at Headquarters in March 2007 commemorating the two hundredth anniversary of the banning of the slave trade and wondered whether the information centres had any activities planned to commemorate that important anniversary.

20. **Mr. Gebreel** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) welcomed the Department's efforts to call attention to the issue of Palestine but wondered whether sufficient attention was paid to increasing awareness of that issue among the many visitors to the Secretariat.

21. **Mr. El-Sherbini** (Egypt) said that the Department should increase its efforts to raise awareness of the situation in the Middle East but must do so in an objective and neutral manner based on the situation on the ground. In that context he requested information on activities to train Palestinian journalists. He also expressed concern that, in spite of the official policy of equality for the official languages of the Organization, reports of the Secretary-General were posted on the Internet first in English and only subsequently, sometimes days later, in other official languages.

22. **Mr. Farhane** (Morocco) welcomed the Department's close cooperation with Member States and wondered whether the information centres could play a role in school-related outreach. Underscoring the need for an integrated approach to human rights, he wondered what educational or training activities were planned to increase awareness of that issue.

23. **Mr. Ali** (Sudan) underscored the importance of the Department's efforts to train journalists and asked whether the number of journalists being trained, currently 15 per year, would be increased.

24. **Mr. Akasaka** (Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information), in response to the representative of Jamaica with regard to commemorating the end of the slave trade, said that an exhibition and a briefing note had been prepared, NGOs had received a briefing, there had been an article in the *UN Chronicle*, musical programmes had been organized in cooperation with the Staff Recreation Council, and a concert organized by the Caribbean States would be held in mid-December.

25. Turning to the questions from the representatives of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and Egypt, he said that the Headquarters exhibition on Palestine had been

updated and the background booklet was in the process of being updated. In addition, 10 Palestinian journalists would be starting the annual training programme in November 2007, and other programmes and the annual international media seminar would continue. He hoped that the Department's publications and communications activities would address the concerns of Member States about political and economic issues related to the question of Palestine.

26. In response to the representative of Morocco, he said that in 2008 the Department would focus on increasing awareness of the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights through various events and programmes. He hoped that an interactive website would be developed on the issues of human rights and disabilities as well as a video and classroom resources. With regard to the question from the representative of the Sudan, he said that the Department would be happy to increase the number of journalists it trained if sufficient resources were available. It was exploring ways of increasing its resources for that purpose, for example through increased voluntary contributions.

27. **The Chairman**, speaking in his personal capacity, asked what criteria were used when selecting journalists to participate in symposiums and training courses, because there had been allegations that the least developed countries were underrepresented. He requested information on the Department's interaction with the regional commissions, in particular the Economic Commission for Africa and on what role the Department played in the Organization's strategy to achieve system-wide coherence.

28. **Mr. Akasaka** (Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information) said, with regard to promoting coherence in United Nations information activities, that it was difficult for the Organization to speak with one voice, as its constituent bodies needed to impart different information for their own specific purposes, but that his Department was making every effort to promote the consistency of messages about the United Nations and to coordinate all its communications and information work. In that context, he drew attention to the "delivering as one" initiative on coherence in United Nations activities in the field of development, environment and humanitarian assistance and to efforts by the Department to promote that coherence at the information level. To that end, the Department held weekly coordination meetings at Headquarters, bringing together some 40 members of the extended United Nations family, with a view to ensuring a coherent information strategy among them.

29. He pointed out that coherence in communication must be integrated with coherence in policy matters, since substantive issues could not be effectively tackled without effective communications strategies to inform the public about how the Organization worked. He acknowledged that much remained to be done in that area, but that the Secretary-General had recognized the need for such integration and the Department was currently working to ensure that its communication activities were fully in step with the policies of the Organization.

30. With regard to the selection of journalists, he outlined the criteria employed, including regional representation, professional standing and fluency in English, and described the procedures followed by his Department in that process. The aim was to ensure a fully transparent process, and efforts were being made to improve it further.

31. On the issue of contacts with partners, particularly in Africa, he reviewed the close cooperation between the Department's Africa Section and the Economic Commission for Africa, including in launching its reports. The Department would also be closely involved in publicizing a number of major events to be held in 2008 at which Africa would be a priority.

32. **Mr. Sandhu** (India) drew attention to the problem caused by media outlets according prominence to unsubstantiated reports relating to the United Nations and stressed the need for prominence to be given, instead, to success stories about its peacekeeping operations. Such stories should also be publicized in the specific areas where such operations were held, as well as through the usual international channels. In particular, he highlighted the important role played by the Department in ensuring that the Organization's peacekeeping activities were correctly reported in the media.

33. **Mr. Akasaka** (Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information) agreed that it was vital to correct such sensationalist and erroneous reports. To that end, his Department provided guidance and performed an advisory role, within its limited

resources, maintaining close working relations with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

34. **The Chairman** invited the Committee, following that interactive dialogue, to continue with its general debate on the item.

35. **Mr. Shafqat** (Pakistan) said that, as the public voice of the United Nations, the Department of Public Information had assumed a far greater dimension in the modern world, which was characterized by the growing polarization of societies and cultures, and had performed commendably in promoting such matters as the reform process within the Organization, climate change, development in Africa, the prevention of genocide and the Millennium Development Goals. The recent resurgence of interest by the Member States in the work of the United Nations could only be further stimulated by the effective performance of the Department, keeping the public at large informed.

36. Regretting the tendency of the media to sensationalize bad news, he stressed the need to spotlight the Organization's ideals and accomplishments and to transmit the United Nations message to all Member States. As those accomplishments tended to be seen as "soft news", with little impact on the public, it was important for the Department to be revitalized and to make fuller use of the capabilities of its personnel. To that end, it should develop a comprehensive strategy aimed at projecting the United Nations as a successful organization that had promoted the development of peoples and helped improve the quality of their lives. That strategy should create an environment conducive to promoting the message of the United Nations and to fostering popular support for its goals and objectives.

37. Reaffirming Pakistan's commitment to the freedom of speech and the role of the media, he reviewed the vibrant state of the media in his country but noted that, while freedom of expression was encouraged, its use as an excuse to malign other faiths was rejected. He stressed that information and communication should serve to bring regions and religions closer together, rather than to divide them.

38. Pakistan attached priority to the work of the United Nations information centres around the world, which helped enhance the interest and involvement of populations in United Nations efforts to promote peace, harmony and development. They also boosted the public image of the United Nations, and his delegation, accordingly, urged the Department to ensure that their technical and human resource requirements were fully met.

39. Noting the imbalances in the flow of information between the developed and the developing world, he called for efforts to strengthen the information and communication infrastructures of the developing countries, which were currently overwhelmed by the vastly better resourced media outlets of the developed world.

40. He also underlined the Department's important role in disseminating information about United Nations peacekeeping operations and in strengthening dialogue among different cultures, with a view to enhancing their mutual understanding and promoting peace.

41. He urged the Department to ensure the equitable representation of journalists from developing countries, not only in securing interviews with the Secretary-General, but, in general, in accreditation to the United Nations. He suggested that priority should be given, in that process, to journalists from developing countries, given how few of them were able to travel to the United Nations to cover its activities.

42. Finally, voicing Pakistan's support for the Dag Hammarskjöld Memorial Scholarship Fund of the United Nations Correspondents Association, he suggested that, in addition to supporting the Association, the Department could also itself finance visits by more journalists from developing countries to the United Nations, thus better equipping them to serve as ambassadors for the Organization in their own societies.

43. **Mr. Taleb** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his country attached importance to the development of a new worldwide information system which was equitable and reflected the principles of the United Nations and international law. The Department had a particular responsibility in pursuit of that lofty goal and it was to be commended on its attainments in publicizing its four key thematic priorities: peace and security, climate change, the Millennium Development Goals and human rights. In United Nations information activities, however, strengthened attention should also be given to other areas, including the Palestinian problem, the occupied Syrian Golan and intercultural dialogue.

44. Turning to the Secretary-General's report (A/62/205), he said that his country welcomed efforts to improve the Department's website, but called for further effort to be made to ensure language parity, particularly regarding the Arabic version of the site. The Syrian Arab Republic also urged the Department to step up its efforts to narrow the digital divide between the North and the South, including through the provision of necessary resources, and, in particular, encouraged the Department to assist with the training of Palestinians working in the media.

45. Partnership between the Department and the non-governmental and private sector was also of great importance and, to that end, the information centres played an important role. Any attempts to streamline them should be based on consultation with the host States and the beneficiary countries.

46. **Mr. Berrah** (Algeria) observed that there was general consensus about the priority and sensitivity of the four key issues on which the Department had been focusing. Those thematic priorities were evidence of the Department's effective communication and information strategy. The strategy, in turn, had to rely on a global network of information centres, services and channels capable of creating a flexible and interactive communication system. Evolving technologies, in the meantime, provided new tools with a much broader reach that reduced the cost and the time needed for communication.

47. The Department must continually upgrade its technological infrastructure in order to expand the audience with access to its website, without forgetting that disparities in levels of development throughout the world required continuing emphasis on traditional means of communication such as radio and television. An effective information strategy had to take into account the specific needs and diversity of the target audiences and adapt the dissemination of news accordingly. When an ordinary citizen in his own country, for instance, learned that the United Nations was coordinating international action in key fields like environmental protection, peace and security and respect for human rights, that individual would be given a strong sense of belonging to a human community beyond national borders.

48. The Department's communication strategy had to be integrated and brought into line with the information initiatives of the various other United Nations bodies in order to create a common strategy conveying complementary messages and serving consistent goals. Multilingualism and language parity were also basic to maximum outreach. Issues dealt with on the website should be regularly updated, and the messages conveyed by the Organization or under its auspices required transparency, impartiality and balance, not to speak of the need for faithful and objective press releases and summary records of meetings.

49. His delegation believed that the information centres should be reorganized differently around regional hubs, depending on the countries concerned and the availability and extent of development of the means of communication.

50. **Ms. Yan** Jiarong (China) said that, at a time of growing support worldwide for the United Nations as the most representative and authoritative intergovernmental organization, particular importance attached to its public information activities. To that end, the Department had identified its communications priorities and objectives and its activities were yielding fruitful results. It was China's hope that the Department would give its four key thematic priorities the targeted and effective publicity that they merited.

51. China believed that the task of publicizing the United Nations should not rest exclusively with the Department of Public Information, but that other United Nations bodies should also enhance their information activities and work to enhance the positive image of the United Nations. In that process, the Department should take responsibility for planning and coordination and for the formulation of inter-agency publicity strategies, making full use of such mechanisms as the United Nations Communications Group and issue-based task forces.

52. Recalling that General Assembly resolution 34/182 had called for "the establishment of a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order intended to strengthen peace and international understanding and based on the free circulation and wider and better-balanced dissemination of information", she noted the particular relevance of that appeal at the current time, with the growing gap between the rich and poor and the ever-widening "digital divide".

53. In China's view, for a more just and more effective world information and communication order,

greater efforts were needed in five major areas. First, the United Nations should ensure the provision of accurate information and rebut distorted and falsified reports.

54. Second, efforts should be made to counter the tendency to focus public opinion on peace issues to the neglect of development. Many issues of particular concern, such as terrorism, climate change and the Darfur crisis, were all ultimately development issues as well, and the United Nations information system should endeavour to ensure that the public at large properly appreciated the role and importance of development.

55. Third, the United Nations information system should play a stronger role in promoting understanding and dialogue among societies and religions, by encouraging media outlets to lead the way in opposing prejudice based on religion, ethnicity and other factors and promoting the concepts of tolerance, respect, justice and harmony.

56. Fourth, traditional means of communication should be strengthened to cater to the needs of developing countries. Given that many regions in the world still relied on broadcast and printed information, it was important that, in its information activities, the United Nations should narrow, and not widen, the existing disparities between different regions and countries in information flows. In that respect, China commended United Nations Radio on its efforts.

57. Fifth, partnerships with the media outlets of developing countries should be promoted and technological assistance and capacity-building made available to them. Accordingly, China encouraged the Department to strengthen its efforts to provide training and internship programmes for journalists from developing countries and hoped that priority could be given to developing countries in the arrangement of media pools or interviews.

58. Sixth, contacts should be strengthened with non-governmental organizations and eminent public figures from developing countries. In particular, China urged the United Nations to appoint more Messengers of Peace and Goodwill Ambassadors from developing countries, thereby ensuring that United Nations messages reached every corner of the world.

59. **Mr. Godinho** (Portugal), speaking on behalf of the European Union; the candidate countries Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey; the stabilization and association process countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia; and, in addition, Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, said that the Department of Public Information was crucial in providing a focused information service of high quality to the United Nations, to media outlets all over the world and to interested citizens. It had developed a commendable strategic approach to promoting global awareness and greater understanding of the work of the United Nations, thereby generating support. Information was particularly important with regard to peacekeeping operations, conflict prevention and other crisis-management and peacebuilding activities.

60. The Department should set well-defined goals, identify target audiences, delegate dissemination as appropriate, and assess the impact of its activities, which were of particular interest to the European Union. Since the Internet was a growing source of news for audiences around the world, it was well that the United Nations website had been made more user-friendly, providing a range of news in a variety of presentations in several languages; and that its multilingual programming was now better managed. The goal should be language parity within existing resources. More information about the United Nations should be made available on the Internet, especially in ways that attracted the interest of young people. At the same time, the United Nations message also had to reach those in developing countries without access to the new technologies, requiring continued reliance on traditional means of communications like the radio and the press.

61. The fundamental players in spreading the message to every corner of the world were the United Nations information centres. The Department should continue to rationalize their work in order to enhance outreach, and to foster fruitful cooperation among them and with the regional centres.

62. The new strategic approach adopted by the United Nations libraries was designed to expand their ability to offer information on a wide range of topics not only within the United Nations but also worldwide.

63. The growing number of journalists being killed or taken hostage was extremely alarming — 47 had been killed thus far in 2007, including the recent odious killing of a Japanese journalist in Myanmar and of a *Washington Post* journalist in Baghdad. The Security

Council itself considered such violence against journalists as a possible threat to international peace and security.

64. The European Union, reiterating its commitment to freedom of expression and freedom of the press, repudiated all attempts, in any society, to control or influence the media in order to suppress information and opinion.

65. **Mr. Ali** (Sudan) said that individuals and institutions worldwide and in developing countries in particular, including the Sudan, looked to the Department of Public Information, which was the voice of the United Nations, to disseminate information covered in a balanced, impartial and transparent manner in a free and independent environment.

66. Referring to the four themes identified as main areas for future activities of the Department, he proposed that attention should also be devoted to fostering the dialogue among civilizations and the culture of peace and tolerance; much of the misunderstanding and violence in today's world resulted from prejudice, miscommunication or lack of communication, and the Department could play a significant part in promoting friendship, understanding and respect for all cultures, religions and civilizations. To that end, he encouraged ongoing consultation with Member States, particularly where information and communication plans for the Organization were concerned.

67. Despite enormous efforts by the Department, the digital divide between rich and poor remained a persistent obstacle to transmission of the United Nations message to those without access to advanced communication technologies, notably in impoverished African and other countries. Continued reliance on traditional means of communication, particularly radio and print, was therefore vital to reaching populations in remote areas, with the added advantages of wider audiences and cost savings. Use of local languages and the establishment of regional and national partnerships were also vital to the effective and accurate communication of messages. He hoped, however, that more resources would be allocated to the Department's training programme for journalists; at the present time, only 15 training grants were available annually, which was too low a number. He also hoped that the Department would pursue its commendable efforts to achieve parity among the official languages on its website and in other services, with special focus on addressing the unequal use of English compared with the five other official languages, particularly Arabic.

68. He applauded the Department's work in promoting peacekeeping operations, in which context he referred to his country's signature of a peace agreement that had ended 20 years of war and led to the establishment of a Government of National Unity. The Sudan was also preparing to participate with the other parties to the Darfur Peace Agreement in a decisive conference to be held in Tripoli during the current month. With that in mind, he said that the Department should be involved in strengthening the culture of peace and understanding by avoiding any replication of biased reports aired in the media for political aims that were inconsistent with the United Nations message and by coordinating closely with Governments.

69. Developing countries, particularly in Africa, continued to merit special attention from the Department, not least in matters where progress had been achieved, including the Millennium Development Goals, malaria and HIV/AIDS, poverty alleviation and socio-economic development. He also urged stronger cooperation with such United Nations bodies as the Special Committee of 24 on Decolonization, as well as further work on the special information programme on the question of Palestine with a view to mobilizing additional support and raising awareness of the cause of the Palestinian people in their just fight for exercise of their inalienable rights and the establishment of an independent State.

70. **Mr. Zhanibekov** (Kazakhstan) said that his delegation supported the Department's continuing efforts to improve the United Nations information infrastructure and project a positive image of the Organization. The culture of communication should permeate all levels of the United Nations, as a way of creating broad global support. Information about United Nations activities should be publicized in every part of the world, including the Commonwealth of Independent States, expanding geographical outreach and target audiences. While the Department's streamlined operation had improved the spread of information, more should be done to inform Member States that were not members of the Security Council about the issues being dealt with by that body. The Department was working admirably to highlight the key thematic priorities of the Organization.

71. Kazakhstan supported the consolidation of United Nations information centres around regional hubs as a

way of improving the United Nations worldwide advocacy. There was a welcome collaboration between the 63 information centres around the world and the local United Nations country teams.

72. The Department should publicize the positive experiences of Member States in areas of global concern. World attention should be drawn, for example, to the fact that his own country, having been used as a nuclear testing-ground under the Soviet regime, had immediately after independence dismantled its sizeable nuclear infrastructure and arsenal, marking the first time in history that a nation possessing such destructive force had given it up voluntarily, and determining Kazakhstan's global security strategy thereafter. The global repercussions of the environmental disaster in the Aral Sea region, which could be remedied only with external technical and financial assistance, should also be given more prominence; and Kazakhstan's valuable experience in maintaining harmonious relations among so many ethnic and religious groups might be of interest to the world public, as also its international initiatives to further dialogue among world religious leaders and on security issues in Asia.

73. The timeliness of establishing a single global information and communication space within the United Nations was unarguable; and Kazakhstan, was creating a national information framework — "e-government" — to work in conjunction with the global information community.

74. **Mr. Punkrasin** (Thailand), speaking on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), observed that in the age of globalization, information was a potent tool that must not remain in the hands of the privileged few, but should be distributed objectively in a balanced and unbiased fashion. It was increasingly hard for the people of the world to distinguish between truthful information and distorted perceptions, either because they were inundated, in technologically advanced parts of the world, with too much information or because, in areas of the world without the needed basic infrastructure, they were not connected to the pool of information available to others.

75. In such an environment, the United Nations faced the two major challenges of increasing the general public's understanding of its work, and ensuring the most efficient flow of information within the Organization. The Department of Public Information was meeting the first challenge by focusing on the crucial issues being addressed by the United Nations, such as peace, development, human rights, the Millennium Development Goals, and non-traditional threats to human security like terrorism, climate change or communicable diseases. The Department could, however, focus more on one other important issue — the promotion of dialogue among civilizations — and could help connect peoples of different backgrounds by highlighting the common problems and challenges they all faced.

76. Better coordination could improve the flow of information among the various United Nations agencies, and between them and the outside world. The Department had several promising new strategies built on a closer relationship with its network of information centres, its connections with other United Nations departments and with more than 1,500 civil society organizations. ASEAN and the United Nations had, for instance, signed a memorandum of understanding regarding exchanges of information and expertise between them. ASEAN also encouraged the Department to strengthen its partnership with international media organizations around the world in order to broaden its public outreach. ASEAN members had themselves undertaken to develop closer links with local and regional media in order to improve their people's understanding of international events and objectives. They attached importance to developing their young people and were pleased to note that the Department had also taken creative steps to reach educators and young people with objective and balanced information. Since the handling of information was so important, the Department should also be commended for its efforts to improve the United Nations information capacity.

77. Speaking for itself, Thailand, now a member of the Committee on Information, pledged its full support for the Organization's work in that area.

78. Mr. Htin **Lynn** (Myanmar) speaking in exercise of the right of reply to the delegation of Portugal, said that it was wrong to exploit the unfortunate killing of a Japanese journalist in Myanmar, an incident that had never occurred before, in order to further a hidden political agenda. His Government disseminated information effectively and impartially, and the incident in question was totally unrelated to the matter under discussion in the Committee.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.